

ISSN 0795-4417

IRORO

A journal of Arts
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

Vol. 13 Number 1&2, June 2008

THE FACULTY OF ARTS
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

Published for
Faculty of Arts
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma,
Nigeria.

By
Ever-blessed Publishers
5, Oghogho Street,
Off Dawson Road,
Benin City, Edo State.
08056450024.

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FIRST PUBLISHED 2007

ISSN 0795-4417

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Overseas: \$100; Euro 50: Single copy.

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE KEEPING IN AFRICA

Lemuel Ekedegwa Odeh*

ABSTRACT

Conflict occurs due to a misunderstanding or clash of interest between or amongst Parties, Nations, Groups, Organizations or Individuals, either because they are pursuing opposing and incompatible objectives or because of political relevance. There are almost two hundred sovereign states in the globe and some of these states occasionally wage wars on one another in pursuance of economic advantage and political gain. The African continent is not bereft of this conflictual phenomenon. Thus, conflicts in Africa in recent times are a recurring decimal, much to the distress of the people. This interminable conflict results in extermination of lives, destruction of property and among others. To this end, this paper seeks to posit that conflicts in Africa can be a thing of the past as recognition, bequeathed to conflict resolution mechanism, conflict transformation and conflict management policies and principles, which are recipe for peaceful co-existence, paradigms and internalization.

Introduction

There are almost 200 sovereign states and some of these states occasionally wage wars on one another in pursuance of economic advantage and to gain political influence. The African continent is not exempted from the above trend. Conflict occurs due to a clash of interests between Parties, Nations, Groups, Organizations, or Individuals, either because they are pursuing opposing or incompatible objectives. Conflict has often been interchangeably used with war. It is more acceptable to restrict the meaning of the term "war" to violent conflict involving armed forces of nations or groups. A conclusive and succinct explanation by Okon E. Okon, "in conflict and crisis in Africa: An overview" sums it up as follows:

Thus, though all wars involves organized violence in which Troops are mustered, not all conflicts are organized and therefore, conflict can not be exactly be equated to war. War is only a particular kind of conflict.¹

To begin with what is conflict? Otite defines conflict as "a situation that develops from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and a groups in defined and social and physical environments".² The clash of interests is the core of this definition of conflict. Coser regards conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of

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the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals".³ This can also be taken to mean that the incidence of scarce values is the trigger for conflict by contending parties. Thus, conflict becomes a social mechanism of settling aspirations to these claims. In this manner, conflict can also be beneficial if its outcomes are not fatal to the goal of the conflict itself. In this light, Park and Bugress argue that conflict exists to settle divergence and dichotomous tendencies even though this leads to the extermination of one of the contending parties to bring some form of unity.⁴

Therefore, conflict can be progressive. In this manner, Deutsch⁵ agrees that whenever conflicts do arise, and despite the inevitability of the victor and vanquished situation, an "all win" situation may also be reached whereby both parties actually record a measure of success. So why conflict? The reasons for the incidence of conflict is both remote and immediate, mono factorial or multi factorial depending on the nature of societies in the enduring conflict itself. What is observed however is that conflict is more prone to heterogenous societies. These are human organizations with a lot of diversities in ethnic groups, tribes, religions, professions, bureaucratic and administration machinery. This pluralism cuts across, political, social, economic and cultural spheres of human existence.

In fact, Jibo et al in quoting Otite and Liphart assessed that "plural societies exhibit a high degree of societal fractionalization".⁶ Otite in noting these diversities, observed that the factors of ethnic, religious and class cleavages are the major points of divergence.⁷ James asserts that "there are about approximately 500 mutually unintelligible languages spoken in Nigeria".⁸ This is an approximation for Nigeria. The West African sub-region and the rest of the world have a lot more. This is the basis for conflict as these groups in quest for economic, political and social resources, battle each other, most times for supremacy and control.

Trends also show that conflicts over resources are much more easier to resolve than conflicts over values. This is why religious conflicts are difficult to resolve due to their complicated and controversial nature. The Sharia law is a very good case point. Arguably, such diversity if managed well should provide the basis for co-operation and solidarity but when ill-managed, becomes the basis of endemic conflict. Here in Nigeria, the problems of Federalism continue to haunt us. Regionally, conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea over resources and the lingering problems in the international arena especially the Middle East Crisis, the war between Congo Democratic Republic and Rwanda, the Serbian and Kosovo conflicts, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the US and the case of Nigeria and Cameroon over ownership of the oil rich Bakassi peninsula are living examples of the effects of these diversities. Therefore, they are real and should be paid attention to.

Otite maintains that "a plural society is thus characterized by co-existing but distinct cultural diversities and group behaviours of the incorporated peoples".⁹ The basic situation seen all over the world is a situation of group intercultural encounters in the process of fostering specific interests and aspirations in the view of limited common resources.

Another side to it is that despite these cleavages that restrict concessions and consensus, there are often political, economic and social reasons that bind various groups with a common identity and focus. We can also adduce from this introspection that conflict also involves situations in which differences are expressed by interdependent people in the process of achieving their needs and goals.¹⁰

Conceptual Terminologies

Conflict Resolution: Conflict resolution can be best understood as any attempt either by diplomacy, negotiation, mediation or bargaining in order to settle disputes or agreement between or amongst nations, groups, international organizations or individuals amicably.

Peace-Keeping: This operation is essentially one of the most important activities of the United Nations. It was developed by the UN at the start of the cold war in the late 1940s because of the unpracticability of the original collective security arrangement envisaged by the U.N.O. and the increasing disagreement among the power states. Peace keeping is therefore, a practical mechanism developed by the United Nations to curtail and control armed conflicts and to facilitate their resolution by peaceful means.¹¹

Peace-Making: It is a process whereby conflicts are brought to a controllable level as a result of the effect of the peace-keeping mechanism. Also, it is the process of negotiating through governmental, political and diplomatic mechanisms. While peace-keeping is carried out by the troops (armed forces), peace-making is the responsibilities of the crisis managers and diplomats.¹² Therefore, peace-keeping and peace-making instruments are both complementary. For instance, UNIMOG was able to provide a stable, peaceful environment between Iran and Iraq which facilitated the proximity talks between the Iranian and Iraqi Foreign Ministers under the U.N. auspices. Similarly, UNEF 2 was able to stabilise the Sinai situation and to provide peaceful environment, conducive to the effective implementation of the Camp David Accord and eventual peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979.¹³

Peace-keeping Mission cannot resolve any conflict by itself; it is a means to an end not an end in itself. The technique in peace-keeping expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace. Furthermore, in pursuance of an acceptable definition of the boundaries between conflict and peace-keeping, there is the need to look at the characteristics of conflict.

International Politics: In a simple language, International politics refers to interaction among nations that is specifically "political". It revolves around the struggle by nation states to get their value and beliefs accepted, in the international arena.

International politics depends on power of states such as the ideological rivalry that existed between the super-powers, issue of arms race and war, which represent struggles. In international politics, states are the major actors, non-state actors are used only to foster the interest of nation-states. Thus, according to Ray Ofoegbu "When actors interact, react or associate in ways which lead to binding allocation of value in the International system, when the representative of the actors meet or exchange notes or by some other processes, discuss, debate, argue, negotiate or seek accommodations and compromises with a view to achieving binding agreements or settlements, then we have International politics".¹⁴ Therefore, international politics is a narrow and miniature part of international Relations. It concerns only political issues, and is multi-dimensional in nature

Conflict And Conflict Analysis

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English defines, conflict as fights, struggles and disagreements. These fights, struggles and disagreement can be in terms of opposition and differences, which normally originate from differences in opinions and desires.¹⁵ Katz and Kahn in an effort to make the term simple asserted that, "two system, groups, persons, organisations and nations are in conflict when they interact directly in such a way that the actions of one tend to prevent or compel some outcomes against the resistance of the other".¹⁶ Flippo stated that, "conflict occurs when two or more people or groups perceive that they have incompatibility of goals and the interdependence of activities".¹⁷

It is in this vein that, Kenneth Boulding opined that, "conflict is an activity that is found almost everywhere in the world of man and all the social affairs". Furthermore, conflict is therefore a creation of a situation in which one individual wishes to follow a line of action that would make it difficult or impossible for someone else to pursue his own desire. To this end, all politics, all leadership and all organizational set-up are involved in the management of conflict, thus, conflict provides the key to understanding political affairs.

Characteristics Of Conflict

There are varied features that lead to conflict. Among these characteristics are:

- i. Contentious issues held by parties involved in the disputes.
- ii. The parties may disagree on certain issues on which each party may be claiming its own right.
- iii. The claim of right may lead to counter claims by the opposing parties, when the disagreement cannot be possibly resolved amicably to the satisfaction of the contending parties as dispute stands.
- iv. Attitude held by the parties involved in the disagreement. In this circumstance, if the parties involved in the disagreement could hold peaceful talks in which case the conflict could be mild, but on the other hand, when parties involved in the dispute hold hostile disagreement, then the dispute will definitely degenerate into conflict.

Attitudes are usually psychological issues that take the form of civil strife, military or diplomatic actions.¹⁸ There are three schools of thought in the understanding of conflict, the liberal view of conflict, the Marxist approach and liberation wars approach to conflict.

Liberal View Of Conflict

Many liberal scholars see conflict as being managed through reason and goodwill and a readiness to compromise and agree. Though, conflict seen from this point of view has its disadvantages, it is as well functional and stabilizing rather than disruptive.

These Liberal conflict scholars like George Simmel, John W. Burton, K.E. Boulding, R.E. Park, E.W. Burgess and L.A. Cozer see conflict as a form of integrative tendency.¹⁹ For instance, for George Simmel, conflict is one of the central forms of interaction among men. He further stated that, conflict is designed to resolve divergent misconceptions.²⁰ Not only that, it is a way of achieving some kind of unity even if it is through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties.

Park and Burgess treat conflict as a form of interaction that helps to stabilise the society. But in contrast to some of these views, some other liberal scholars see conflict as a dissociative process, G.A. Lindberg stated that, conflict is a suspension of communication between the opposing parties.²¹ Likewise, L. Wilson and W.L. Kolb see conflict as a disjunctive process; for them, conflict takes place between individuals, organizations or groups who seek to possess the same objective, occupy the same space or exclusive position, play incompatible roles, maintain incompatible goals and undertake mutually the same means for achieving their purpose and interests.²²

The Marxist Approach To Conflict

The Marxist approach to conflict takes a different stand from the liberal view point. The Marxist approach believes that conflict comes about because of the contradictions in the human environment through class struggle. It can be understood that, conflict is inevitable in human society. As a matter of fact, the Marxist scholars viewed conflict in the society as resulting from the interaction between social aggregates/classes. Hence, conflict is inherent in the class system and it is incapable of solving the class distinction within system. Crises such as mutual exploitations, enslavement, unequal distribution of scarce resources, and 'thingification' are some of the manifestations of conflict or struggle between conflicting classes.²³

Evidently, these approaches focus more on class antagonism with no recognition that other kinds of conflict such as ethnic, religious, economic and political conflicts exist within the society. Apart, conflict also has three dimensions, viz. bitter end or joint survival conflict (both of the parties are likely to survive). Fundamental or accidental conflict and manageable or unmanageable conflict e.g. Korean war of (1950-1952) and Vietnam war Tutsi and Rwanda (1965-1972).²⁴

Liberation Wars Approach:- Colonialism which is the process of taking political, economic and social control of a state without the consent of its owners by another state is an action which degenerates into conflict. This leads to a conflict where patriotic citizens of the occupied state, with the spirit of nationalism, rise up to their responsibilities and kick against foreign rule and domination. The action of the nationalists whose results are usually based on unity of purpose to liberate their motherland and seek sovereign status is normally carried out through the liberation wars. We are living witness in Africa where nationalist groups in Southern Africa especially in Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Angola have waged protracted liberation wars in order to liberate their colonized territories. These liberation wars have paid off handsomely because all the colonized territories mentioned above, have gained political independence in their respective countries. However, in Angola rival nationalist groups are still waging war against the government in power in order to gain control of the central machinery of power and economic and political set back.

Conflicts in Africa

Many people and institutions consider conflict to be inherently negative dynamic. In much of the academic and policy literatures, the term 'Conflict' is used in a situation of mass violence. This perspective is understandable in the light of the destruction brought about by armed hostilities, but it might be an oversimplification and misleading. The contention is that social and political conflicts are a normal and ubiquitous in all societies which comprise diverse groups. Whether the groups are defined by ethnicity, religious politics or class, they have different political interests, values and access to power and resources. These differences do not necessarily generate competition and conflict. Such individual interest conflict is seen in the case of Sierra Leone conflict, where the coup of Brig. Bio over Victor Strasser regime was alleged basically for him to be in power.²⁵

Conflicts could arise when states lack the capacity to fulfil certain responsibilities. In the absence of variable international means of protecting rights and interest, managing competition and settling disputes and grievances, individuals and group resort to violence. Also, if the state is too weak to maintain law and order, then criminal activity and privatized security may flourish. Sierra Leone was typical example of this problem. The war in Sierra Leone was largely fuelled by poverty, deprivation and loss of faith by the citizenry in their governance. The same can also be said of the situation in Chad.²⁶

Conflicts in Africa also have arisen when the state lacks popular legitimacy, either because they are wholly authoritarian or because everywhere they are unable to exclude ethnic or religious minority from governance, this was the situation in Rwanda, the Hutu and Tutsi brouhaha.²⁷

Regionally, contentious conflicts also include the Liberia and Guinea-Bissau resources as well as in Nigeria and the Niger Delta armed militia over resources and the quest to control the revenue base as their right because of the oil base in the

Delta.

Marginalized and oppressed communities may seek to resolve crisis through armed rebellion. Examples are the Niger Delta, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Chad etc. Hostilities are likely to be intense and sustained because the stakes are high. This was evidenced in Sierra Leone where the governance was not able to escape the political landmines of corruption, tribalism and government by self service which led to the fall of the APC government. The government lost the tremendous good will with which the Sierra Leoneans had greeted it when it initially came to power, whereby a large section of the population became alienated and discontented.²⁸

In Nigeria, for instance, some individuals and groups have indicated intention for a break up. However, these groups do not understand that in those areas where the break up had taken place, they have continued to be faced with multiplying conflicts and other socio-economic problems. A good example is the former USSR. Therefore, the various calls for restructuring and national conference are ill-motivated and uncalled for. Nigeria's progress can only be achieved through an enduring democracy. At this juncture, it is absolutely necessary to indicate here that countries like Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and India have all divided based on this arrangement but the units are still held together. The strength of this togetherness lies in the patriotism, unity and size of these countries.

Ways Of Resolving Conflicts in Africa

Having seen what conflict and international politics entail, coupled with the various schools of conflicts, the next and concluding question perhaps is: How can these conflicts be resolved?

On a general note, compromise, third party mediation or adjudication can resolve conflict, they can equally be resolved by conquest or deference.

In Article III of the O.A.U. charter, it commits the O.A.U. to peaceful settlement of conflict by negotiation, mediation or arbitration. The first case for O.A.U. came when she mediated in the Algeria Morocco border conflict and that of Kenya and Somalia. Other issues tabled for resolution ranged from Western Sahara conflict through Chad and Angolan crisis. In the same vein, UNO and ECOWAS are also important institutions, which constitute vital means of resolving conflict. Conflict could equally be resolved through diplomacy rather than by military confrontation. It is noted that many countries inflict enormous destruction on their enemies due to escalating nature of their approach.

Conflict Resolution, Transformation and Management Process a Review of Methods in the African Sub Region

Overtimes scholars have evolved concepts in defining certain aspects of conflict situations and three broad categories are apt here, these are conflict resolution, conflict management and transformation. Institutions of conflict resolution use these formats in analyzing and solving conflict situations.

According to Mitchell "Conflict resolution is essentially aimed at intervention to change or facilitate the course of a conflict". Burton argues that while the term

recent it depicts the mutual or non-mutual solving of a conflict situation Burton, is quite technical when he also asserts that "settlement" ends dispute not conflict, as conflicts are not "settled" but resolved.²⁹ Thus, we have dispute settlement and conflict resolution. These can be used interchangeably and many analyses have done so. The difference between the two is the scope and diverging conditions surrounding the phenomena, despite this, their concepts are used concurrently. Techniques of conflict resolution include problems-solving workshops, interactive problem solving and third-party consultation. These concepts are self-explanatory as each attempts conflict resolution through a particular process.

Conflict resolution in plural societies can be quite complex. This is because of the influence of culture and language. Despite this factor, culture should instead be a path towards resolution. Perceiving clashes of interest through normative paradigms is quite natural. Otite observes that "people interpret social action through their indigenous conceptions and knowledge."³⁰ Hence, decoding cultural values is a valuable key to conflict resolution as it reveals the value placed on the resources fought for. Modes of intervention are also multiple with new ones being introduced periodically. These include counselling, mediation, therapy, political procedures and initiatives, informal tribunals, conciliation, criminal and civil justice systems. In the process of conflict resolution two or more modes may be combined. The overall benefits are that these perform a healing function in societies as it creates situations for concession and pay-offs in crisis situations.

Conflict Transformation basically refers to the intent to change the nature of pre-existing social relationships from one of hostility and mutual suspicion to those of co-operation, sympathy and solidarity. This stems from the fact that conflict in real terms cannot be eradicated. Therefore since conflicting groups dwell within the same environment, there is a need for an appraisal and substitution of the hostile aspects of such relationships with more subtle and humane ones. Therefore, as Rupesinghe asserts, "the openness to change, flexibility, the ability to peacefully modify approaches and learn from processes is what conflict transformation is all about".³¹

Conflict transformation creates opportunities for the exploration of constructive dialogue, cultures and practices of tolerance, negotiations and the trading and re-balancing of interests, in the process of changing the nature and intensity of conflict.³² It also involves movement, changing roles and functions in the process of negotiating settlement of conflict issues. It is this situation that Lederach calls "constructive transformation of conflicts".³³ The intent here is to bring forth situation that would encourage peaceful change through non-violence mechanisms. Though, the most recent aspect of conflict assessment, conflict transformation finds its use in techniques such as mediation, co-dialogue, and peace workshops. Here, the contending parties go through a series of peace building sessions. Howbeit, this may sometimes seem less effective than other strategies of conflict mediation, channels of communication between groups are maintained, the economic and socio-political resources are used to mobilize the processes of periodic recovering so that in the long run a path to peace is built

through a visible change in the nature of existing relationships.

The main preoccupation of this form of conflict resolution is that it holds a strong view that conflict in itself cannot be fully resolved, but the change of existing relationship may terminate hostilities. The techniques used by this form of conflict reduction are seminars, workshops, interactive parleys, truce meetings, and elite gatherings. It is utilized extensively by international Non-Governmental Organizations (N.G.O.s) in solving the conflicts and it is relatively new perspective in assessing the conflict situation.

Conflict management is the main strategem of this research paper. By conflict management, we are referring in essence to the best way of reducing the negative aspects of a situation or phenomenon that is difficult to resolve. Evans-Pritchard sees conflict management as "a mechanism by which the political structure maintains itself". Therefore from the foregoing we can also term conflict management as an institutionalized activity, thus a near equilibrium-restoring instrument in society.³⁴

In fact, conflict management can also be described as conflict resolution and conflict transformation fused together. It informs a long-term plan to deal with reoccurrent conflict situations. People adapt and are taught how to manage conflicts productively overtime as these principles are then made permanent through their institutionalization. This gives it a sort of permanent status, making it ready to deal with other conflict situations that may arise in the course of human interactions. It is this concept of conflict solving that has entailed the establishment of institutions like the Supreme Court, the ECOWAS and the United Nations as conflict management organisations.

Wilmot and Hooker identify specific ideas in elaboration of conflict management techniques. These include clarification of communication and the checking of perceptions which in turn involve the following: speaking out what is on one's mind, listening carefully, expressing strong feelings appropriately, remaining rational, asking directly what is going on, identifying conflict patterns, recognizing the power of initiating a co-operative move, engaging in negotiations of agreement and settlements.³⁵

What can be inferred from the foregoing is that communication skills and channels are crucial in conflict management. Conflict management should occur in spheres that are conducive to contending parties. Irrationality in speech and behaviour should be controlled.³⁶

The most interesting aspect of conflict management as regards Nigeria and Africa is that, traditional conflict management systems may sometimes seem more effective than modern one. The African traditional setting includes swearing of oaths, the dead, deities, swearing of oaths and the invocation of curses and blessing. These factors still hold some measure of awe for Africans in general. Even in the prosecution of conflict objectives they are utilized. What modernity has given us is a more generalized or universalistic conflict management framework on which the institutions established are premised.

Therefore, while conflict resolution itself is about short term strategies of solving conflicts, conflict transformation seeks to effect changes in conflictual relationships, while conflict management adopts the long term strategy of conflict solving through the institutionalization of conflict management principles. Apart from these, three core basic concepts of conflict are also agreed procedures of conflict resolution. These procedures are used interchangeably depending on how each procedure ensures effectiveness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be observed from details given in this paper that there are so many issues that contribute to a state of conflict. It is also noted that though conflict has become an unavoidable evil in human endeavours, there are so many means of resolving it. The best however, is by peaceful means. In attempting to therefore, define the boundaries between conflict resolution and peace keeping, examples have been drawn from practical application of these machinery in the resolution of conflicts in the international arena and in Africa in particular. However, it could be further observed from examples given, the involvement of the UNO in conflict resolution, that the hypocrisy of some of the Veto powers have continued to deter the UNO from imposing the fundamental human right laws and applying in practical terms most of its resolutions. The case of Israel/Palestinian issue is a ready example.

Finally, and, conflicts in Africa and the world over are mind-boggling. The international regulatory bodies such as O.A.U, UNO among others must put a halt to these Genocide conducts since war kills its children.

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